A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF TEACHING METHODS AND THEIR INFLUENCE UPON WRITING DEVELOPMENT IN JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL SEVENTH GRADE ADVANCED CLASSES

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by

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

When people refer to the "new methods of teaching" they generally mean a classroom filled with all the modern conveniences of teaching--a complete audio-visual laboratory, a well-equipped library, spacious room, the most modern of textbooks, and, of course, a television set. In contrast, when one refers to the older methods, he pictures a scene quite differently--a sparsely furnished room, few books, straight-backed desks, and a severely stern-faced teacher demanding that the students parrot back the information cited in the texts or suffer the blow of the switch. As is apparent, one tends to oversimplify. Just because a teacher or a school uses one or a few of the countless innovations proposed in the last few years, an improvement in teaching methodology does not necessarily follow. Sometimes the spirit has been "Let's try anything as long as it is new." Sometimes the traditional methods have been discarded simply because they are traditional. No one can defend all the new innovations because some of them are poorly conceived, and some are down-right ridiculous. There is no doubt that errors have occurred in the development of "modern education."

Of all the subjects taught in the schools the

language arts often receive the least attention in curriculum planning and evaluation of methods used to present the material to the student. The classroom and its study of language have been isolated too long from the everyday behaviorial situations which give language meaning.

> Its function is to serve as a connecting link between the members of a social organization, the speech community. It is our means of cooperation and interaction with others of our group. To lose sight of this primary function of the language for a single moment in the school is to make the study sterile.[1]

The support for teaching the use of language rests upon the conviction that the ability to use acceptable language forms is "not only the most important asset of the ambitious but also an obligation for every good citizen."[2]

But how does one meet this obligation? At present the common approach to teaching language in many classrooms is to assume that the student is devoid of all language knowledge when he enters the class on the first day of school. The repetitiveness of the language arts program is apparent upon examination of the table of contents in many of the popular English textbooks. From this assumption the general procedure is to reteach all that the student

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[1]Aileen Traver Kitchen, "On the Teaching of the English Language," Teachers College Record, XLIX (December, 1947), 165.

[2]Ibid., p. 169.

learned in the previous years, plus the material new to his present grade level. Lorraine D. Sundal, however, casts doubt upon this assumption:

> Just as a small portion of an iceberg shows above the waterline--the bulk of it being below and not observable--so we believe there is much about grammar and usage that students know unconsciously and use automatically and with which we therefore need not be concerned.[1]

Here is the crux of the problem in teaching language and the basis for this report--Is too little assumed about the student's knowledge of the language and is too much drill material used to teach material which the student already knows, thereby destroying the student's interest in this most important area of learning?

I. THE PROBLEM

Statement of the problem. The purpose of this study was to determine whether or not written and oral comments coupled with individual discussion and prescribed practice drills in developing student writing ability at the seventh grade level are comparable to teaching those same skills through written and oral comments coupled with general class discussions and remedial exercises as conducted at the Albert W. Merrill Junior High School,

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[1]Lorraine D. Sundal, "A transition Program in Grammar and Usage," English Journal, XLV (April, 1956), 195.

Des Moines Independent Community School District, Des Moines, Iowa.

Importance of the study. This writer felt that too much time has been spent in the classroom teaching grammar and usage through the method of formal presentation followed by drill. Often times the formal presentation and the drill period take up all the time allotted to English, causing other areas of language to be slighted. Too often written and oral composition must take an inferior place to grammar and usage. Philip Burnham made three statements regarding the teaching of English:

1. Grammar is important, but that grammar is only one part of language study and needs to be taught as such, particularly with thought and imagination constantly moving the study of grammar toward effective speaking and writing.
2. Language study comes out of the students' own speaking and writing.
3. Language power grows from the students' own critical thinking.[1]

The majority of a student's communication within his society will involve self-expression through writing

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[1]Philip Burnham and others, "Some Definitions of Terms: Report of the Language Committee," Essays on the Teaching of English, eds. Edward J. Gordon and Edward S. Noyes (New York: Appleton-Century-Croft, Inc., 1960), p. 27.

or speaking. To aid the student to become a productive member of his society, the schools must train him in these two areas of expression so that he can use the language common to business and professional life in America.

With this purpose of teaching kept firmly in mind, the teacher of English must reach for a curriculum which will embody all elements necessary to help the student in finding his place in his society and becoming successful in his role. To do this the teacher must continually question the value of the subject matter being taught and the methods used in teaching the material.

This paper attempts to discover the relationship of extensive formal drill to usage and composition.

II. DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED

Drill. Drill is a method of teaching based upon repetition to establish fixed responses. The repetitive effort necessary to fix the response is generally carried on in what is known as the practice period.[1]

Individual instruction. Individual instruction is a method of instruction that allows the student to advance at his own rate, not the rate set by the class as a group.

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[1]Homer Boroughs, Jr., Clifford D. Foster, and Rufus C. Salyer, Jr., Introduction to Secondary School Teaching (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1964), p. 231.

This method allows each student to pass material in which he displays competence or to spend additional time on materials in which there is a lack of proficiency.

Prescribed drill. Prescribed drill is that drill material which is prescribed to teach a particular skill. This form of drill occurs prior to practical use of the skill being taught. An example of prescribed drill is teaching a skill such as recognition of a noun clause from preprinted materials without going into the process of formulating a noun clause and discussing its purpose.

Remedial drill. The use of remedial drill becomes necessary after material has been presented to the student, and he shows a definite lack of proficiency. This form of drill is most applicable in individualized instruction. Once the student discovers his inability in handling a specific skill such as noun clauses, he receives remedial drill to correct the deficiency.

III. PROCEDURE

The material for this study was gathered from a grammar and usage pretest and a post-test administered to two seventh grade advanced sections at the Merrill Junior High School, Des Moines, Iowa, and from themes written by the same two groups.

For this study it was necessary to use intact groups.

One section received individualized instruction with remedial drills. The other section received a formal class presentation with prescribed drills. Each section received an equal number of theme assignments with the same pre-instruction. Upon completion, each theme was evaluated as to unity, coherence, originality, and formal grammar with usage and mechanics subdivided into the component parts relating to the type of errors made by the students. The individuals in the experimental section then received remedial practice drills according to each student's needs. The papers from the control class were evaluated the same as the papers from the experimental group, but there were no group drills on errors in the experimental class.

At the end of the experimental sequence, group means were computed to determine for each variable studied the progress in each of the following categories: The number of errors in each category for themes one and ten; the use of originality, coherence, etc., in the themes; and the results of the pretest and the post-test grammar and usage tests. A study of the various means should indicate which method of studying language is the most profitable to the student.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The last few years have seen the beginning of a search for a more satisfactory method of teaching English than has been practiced in the classroom. Each new method must be tried and compared with the success and failure of the traditional approach. This study of the teaching methodology in English has resulted in much heated controversy over which is the better, the traditional method or the newer innovative approach.

I. PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT FOR USE OF DRILL

One controversial form of teaching methodology being discussed by scholars is drill. Long associated with the mechanical-like schoolmaster of early America, this time-honored method is undergoing close scrutiny.

> The radicals are burying it verbally as too outmoded to be tolerated. The liberals urge judicious employment of it. The conservatives engage its services without apology. And the reactionaries nostalgically await its victorious return. Our position is closest to that of the liberals who, although aware of the dangers of excess, advocate the employment of drill when in harmony with learning theory.[1]

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[1]Gail M. Inlow, Maturing in High School Teaching (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1964), p. 167.

English teachers have considerable freedom to choose among the many methods of presenting their subject matter to their students. "Although few would publicly avow a preference for rote learning, casual observation indicates that some teachers nonetheless encourage it."[1] Perhaps analyzing the differences of teaching methods and the freedom to choose the method could be included in future studies. However, since the conditions under which the teacher works--composition of the class, physical facilities, etc.,--are not usually of his own choosing, he is not entirely free in this matter.

While the teacher has usually been somewhat free to select the teaching method needed to fit the requirements of the students, repetition has traditionally been a major feature of every theory of learning. "In memoriter learning or the fixing of skills, repetition has always been considered necessary. In the stimulus-response theory of learning it became the key to mastery."[2]

The idea of the nature of repetition and the means of its implementation, however, are greatly different.

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[1]Donald Ross Green, Educational Psychology (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1964), p. 57.

[2]Nelson L. Bossing and Roscow V. Cramer, The Junior High School (Boston: Houghton Mifflan Company, 1965), p. 107.

> Learning by fixing of skills or memory was achieved by repeatedly stimulating the proper sensory neurons until the proper neural pathways (so-called) had been established in the nervous system. The word familiarly associated with this process was drill. The pupil drilled on multiplication tables, spelling lists, writing form, typing, or whatever was to be fixed in the neural pathways so that automatic responses resulted. It was customary to hear teachers adjure their pupils to get to work and drill until they had mastered the skill in question.[1]

Until the last few years, the predominant thought on drill, as supported by the previously cited quotation by Bossing, was that the student should practice precisely the response over and over until the desired response became completely mechanical. Many times over the student faced the same stimulus and was expected to make the same response each time with no pause to think or consider the form of the situation. "It was even suggested that all arithmetic problems requiring a given skill be worded in the same way so that the student would never be puzzled as to what was called for."[2] The range of this automatic response would depend on the range of situations in which it is used. However, the most efficient way of learning this response is through the individual's own reading, speaking, and writing. "For automatic understanding and

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[1] Ibid., p. 107.

[2] Lee J. Cronbach, Educational Psychology (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1954), p. 376.

use of the word in context, you would need to learn it through seeing its meaning in different contexts."[1]

> Teachers of the past forgot often, and teachers of today forget occasionally, that drill must be based upon understanding. There is no point in drilling upon nonsense syllables, which is actually what the teachers are doing when children memorize work they do not understand which therefore has no meaning for them. It is the teacher's responsibility to see that before any drill is undertaken, pupils know and understand, not only what they are doing, but also why they are doing it.[2]

Before any drill material is administered, the instructor must be sure that the student knows what is to be learned. The teacher must also have a knowledge of the operation of the learning process. Thomas E. Clayton explained the learning process, thus:

> Learning must take place anytime the learner reacts in a situation that affects him. His behavior tendencies may be modified in many ways, but modified they will be. The modification may be a weakening of a tendency. It may be some completely new way of doing something. It may be an increment of skill in a performance or the reduction of a skill already acquired. It is not always possible to predict or assess the learning, but the logic of this description insists that some learning will take place. The learning product may not be socially desirable. We learn to steal and lie just as we learn to act honestly or to tell the truth. We learn false information just as

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[1]William C. Morse and G. Max Wingo, Psychology and Teaching (Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1962), p. 183.

[2]Boroughs, op. cit., p. 233.

> we learn correct information. Our behavior develops in accordance with our reactions to situations.[1]

Clayton continued to explain the learning process by breaking it down into five subdivisions:

1. Learning is a process that involves behavior, sequence of events, and outcomes.
2. Learning results from experiencing. The learner must in some way act upon or react to a situation that impinges upon him.
3. Learning depends upon what the learner does. This involves how he perceives, how he thinks, how he feels, and how he acts. There can be no learning unless he responds in some way.
4. The end result of the learning process is some change in the learner, demonstrable by a change in his behavior, potential or actual.
5. The change in the learner tends to be fixed by the consequences of his behavior in terms of his own motivational systems.[2]

If the process of learning as described in the previous quotation is narrowed down to a few points which give only prime importance to exercise or practice, it would fail to place adequate emphasis on some of the other important facts about learning, namely:

1. If the person practices but does not satisfy his wants as a result, he will learn not to do what he practiced.

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[1]T. E. Clayton, Teaching and Learning: A Psychological Perspective (Foundations of Education Series. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965), p. 45.

[2]Ibid.

2. When the person practices an incorrect response, or uses a faulty method to get the right answer, he may get satisfaction and thereby learn the wrong thing.
3. If the learner can understand the situation and can clearly distinguish the right from the wrong response, a response can be learned with very little repetition. Large amounts of practice may be unnecessary.
4. A pupil must learn to respond to many, many situations. Few of them can be practiced in school. It is therefore necessary to develop the pupil's ability to interpret situations he has not practiced on, and to transfer appropriate responses from previous experience.[1]

> Drill or practice, memorizing, and overlearning perform valid functions in a teaching-learning situation only when they are governed and guided by a clear purpose, goal, and/or standard of achievement in the mind of the learner.[2]

Keeping this concept in mind, the teacher is then brought to the first step in formulating a teaching procedure or method which involves drill as part of its basic function. Roy O. Billett stated the first step as:

> Assuming an aroused purpose which motivates the learner for the course or unit in general, the teacher's first concern in directing drill, practice, memorizing, or overlearning is that of making sure that the learner has a satisfactory immediate goal or standard of achievement in mind.[3]

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[1] Cronbach, op. cit., p. 54.

[2] Roy O. Billett, Teaching in Junior and Senior High Schools (Dubuque, Iowa: William C. Brown Company, 1963), p. 211.

[3] Ibid., p. 212.

To be of much value, or any value, to the student, drill must have meaning. For someone who doesn't know what a subordinate clause is, the instructions "A nonrestrictive clause must be separated by commas" could lead to many minutes of wasted time. However, when the real meaning of subordination is discovered, the student's drill work in a workbook or in the textbook might well be productive for him.

Perhaps the best summary of the value of drill in learning and the processes involved and why it should never be used as a punitive measure was found in Billett's Teaching in Junior and Senior High Schools:

> Whether primarily academic or primarily non-academic abilities are being developed, drill or practice with reference to a goal, or standard achievement, is never mere repetition of the initial responses made by the learner. It is a variable and selective process in which immediate goals, or standards of achievement, are clarified, and if necessary revised. Those responses which are contributing to the achievement of the goal, or standard of achievement in mind, are retained and strengthened.[1]

Drill or practice then should be prepared for the individual according to Billett. Standards of achievement and ability vary from one individual to another and vary within a student from day to day, even minute to minute. Because of such factors as differences in motivation,

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[1] Ibid., pp. 212-213.

previous knowledge, and aptitudes for the development of the particular ability, the amount of time and the number of practice periods required to attain any given standard of achievement vary greatly from one student to another. Because of this variability among students, it is better, as a general rule, Beaumont suggests, to keep drill periods short but intense.

> With strong motivation, a few repetitions may suffice to establish a habit, while in the absence of motivation many repetitions often remain ineffective. This is one of the foundation stones of modern education and the basis for adverse criticism of the so-called drill system. Not that habits cannot be acquired by this drill if the teacher is persistent enough, but the cost in terms of wasted energy is wholly disproportionate to its effectiveness. Moreover, the coercion necessary to bring about learning which, apparently, does not serve this pupil's needs, not only fails to bring about the joyous experience of success which is conducive to further exploration in a particular curricular field, but may lead to an actual dislike of it. It is very apt to develop a feeling of relief to have it over with and may result in resentment against the subject area, the coercing teachers, and the whole system of education.[1]

Repetition is of value in the learning process, but repetition for repetition's sake is not all there is to learning. But because the students may understand a poem or a mathematical or scientific formula but not well enough to repeat them, practice, drill, or repetition is necessary

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[1]Henry Beaumont and Freeman Glenn Macomber, Psychological Factors in Education (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1949), p. 87.

to consolidate such knowledge. "Drill should involve practice in various settings and orders."[1] The student should be able to grasp a situation and see its relationship to a given response. For instance, drill should be sufficiently effective so that a pupil can give the product of 8 x 9 without having to repeat 8 x 7 is 56, 8 x 8 is 64, 8 x 9 is 72. In order to obtain the desired results, the drill will need to be motivated and meaningful.

Drill as a method of teaching is not the complete answer to the teacher's prayer, because, as do all methods, it does have limitations. Beaumont explainedthese limitations which are placed on repetition in the learning process as:

> It must be clearly understood that the mere repetition of an act is not the determining factor responsible for its incorporation into the individual's habit patterns or for its rejection; but, rather, the effects of the response cause it to become habitual. Repetition of an act may lead to its elimination as well as to its habituation, depending on the obtained results. The purposive performance of a reaction having an unpleasant effect which is stronger than the pleasure derived therefrom results in a decreased desire to perform that reaction. In other words, habits may be broken as well as established by repetition--the outcome depending on the desirability of their effect.[2]

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[1]Harold W. Bernard, Psychology of Learning and Teaching (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1965), p. 31.

[2]Beaumont, op. cit., p. 86.

A second requirement noted by Beaumont which must be incorporated into the drill procedure is that the student be given variety.[1] By providing a many-sided approach to learning, this method is more likely to build interest within the student. The well-informed teacher thus seeks ways to keep drill from a monotonous single track of whatever king it is--workbook, blackboard exercises, homework, or just plain desk work.

A third requisite for drill is that the drill material must be re-oriented as quickly as possible to the broader practical context of everyday life.[2]

> Learning theory would include this under a study of transfer. The sequence is customarily as follows: A new process unfamiliar to students is introduced in context; it is next isolated from the natural learning situation for reinforcement purposes; when mastered, it is finally returned to its natural setting.[3]

"If these activities are to be valuable, the need must not only be evident to and understood by the student; it must be accepted as well."[4] When we speak of acceptance, we can mean many forms of acceptance of the drill.

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[1]Inlow, op. cit., pp. 167-68.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Kenneth H. Hansen, High School Teaching (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1957), pp. 200-1.

Hansen went on to explain that to many students drill would never be anything other than a necessary evil and their acceptance would never get beyond this point no matter what motivation the teacher attempted. These students would do the drill just to pass the course, get a grade, and hopefully complete high school so that they might go on to something that they considered more worthwhile. Other students in the classroom would probably accept drill as a means of keeping their position in the class social order, in the family, or with the teachers.[1]

To be of most benefit, drill should be developed to meet the needs of students. Group drill has a definite function when new processes are being introduced, but in its wake should follow drill procedures more narrowly related to the needs of the individual student.[2] One way to relate the material to the needs of the individual student is by using programmed materials.

> In all such group teaching, the good teacher, using a sound general method of teaching aided by carefully chosen texts, well-prepared general and special study--activity guides and valid evaluation procedures--including various auxiliary teaching-learning activities and procedures--succeeds in reaching most individuals in the class, but finds inevitably that one or more students still are

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[1] Ibid., p. 202.

[2] Inlow, op. cit., p. 169.

> falling short of the growth or achievement which they should be making in one respect or another.[1]

During the drill period, however, no attempt should be made to obtain a common level of proficiency, but the teacher should stress individual improvement. "Perhaps through achievement grouping the teacher can obtain a degree of uniformity among small groups, but above all, he should avoid drilling the entire class in an attempt to achieve a common level of proficiency.[2]

Another principle of drill is that it should be used only in those cases where the students will gain the greatest benefits. Inlow believed that these almost universally occur in the skill subjects (mathematics, music, and grammar) and in the motor subjects (physical education, shop, and business education).[3] One must also remember that these subjects are not just drill subjects, but they are also conceptual in nature; and drill should be used in moderate amounts, it at all. For that part of a subject or subjects that responds to mechanical repetitiveness, drill is relevant, but for those that hold concepts, drill may be totally irrelevant. "Learning becomes not the formation of

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[1]Billett, op. cit., p. 218.

[2]Boroughs, op. cit., p. 236.

[3]Inlow, op. cit., p. 168.

a specific mechanical reaction but acquiring familiarity with a type of situation in all its guises.[1] Thorough conceptual learning equips students to respond to the changes in cues with little thinking. This view holds that the rigid response habits brought about by drilling would be in error when conditions change. Of the two forms of learning, conceptual or repetitive, both must uphold transfer to new conditions.

A. N. Frandsen stated that repeated trials are needed but they are not the complete answer for mastering concepts.

> Both repeated trials and perception of their effects (plus other conditions of learning) are required. Broadly interpreted, practice implies both making and checking provisional trials. It is more a matter of discovery than of repetition. Practice is goal-directed trial-and-check process in which the learner tries out tentative hypotheses. On the basis of his perception of their affects, he confirms and consolidates responses or disconfirms and revises provisional trials.[2]

In the trial-and-check process, understanding of the effects of the first trial is crucial. "According to cognitive theory, perception guides learning; motivational reinforcement determines performance."[3] For proper and

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[1]Cronbach, op. cit., p. 376.

[2]Arden N. Frandsen, Educational Psychology: The Principles of Learning in Teaching (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1961), p. 303.

[3]Inlow, op. cit., pp. 168-69.

effective learning, the introductory trial should be informative, precise, and prompt. Moreover, it is very important to clearly distinguish between motivational reinforcement and perception of the effects of the beginning trials. Both motivation and perception affects the selection and elimination of the trial-and-error responses given by the student.

Another factor regarding drill is that it increases in effectiveness to the extent that adolescents are kept informed of their progress. Research supports this convincingly.

> For instance, students who practice to improve their speed of reading improve more rapidly when aware of gains than do their control counterparts who are not aware of gains. In fact, in almost any learning area, the individual who is enabled to read his thermometer of progress is motivated to improve more. Sensitive to this phenomenon, teachers may require students to evaluate their own progress by having them maintain in an English class a notebook of spelling errors; in a foreign language class, a listing of syntactical errors; or in a mathematics class, a record of arithmetical mistakes in the four basic processes.[1]

There are several advantages, one may infer, of keeping track of one's own progress, but the greatest advantage would be that this would be of diagnostic value to both the student and the teacher reported Inlow. From this record of weaknesses and strengths, the student and the teacher

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[1] Ibid.

will be able to get a visual picture of the areas in which the student must do more work and of the areas in which the student has achieved his degree of mastery.

Arden N. Frandsen summed up the use of drill in learning in the following manner:

> It appears, therefore, that practice, not as repetitions of specific behavior patterns but as repeated attempts as discovery of more adequate solutions, is an essential condition of learning only as it provides opportunity for operations of the other essential conditions of learning. It is also apparent that the amount of practice required for mastery of various concepts and skill will vary from only one to many trials, depending both upon the nature of those concepts and skills and upon the effectiveness of provisions for the other conditions of learning.[1]

II. USE OF DRILL IN ENGLISH INSTRUCTION

How does drill apply to the teaching of English? For the first consideration in this area, one should consider the statement by Henry C. Meckel regarding the criteria of determining the objectives of a sequential program of composition in a school system. Nowhere in his four-point statement is drill explicitly mentioned, but it is insinuated in the broad references to the development and growth of necessary skills. Meckel listed four points:

1. The objectives should represent a range of writing situations, so that the total writing process receives attention in the curriculum.

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[1]Frandsen, op. cit., p. 143.

2. The objectives should represent the range of performance typical of pupils at different stages of development--particularly with reference to general sophistication, vocabulary, and organization.
3. The objectives should represent the range of skills which constitute competence in specific writing situations believed to be important.
4. The objectives should represent those phases of skill in which there should be continuous sequential growth.[1]

Immediately following this, the need for drill in individual areas is implicitly expressed in Meckel's next statement that the patterns of language development within the individual and the skills which characterize him as a person do not necessarily follow group patterns. Language is an area of development in which more degrees of variation can be observed among individuals than in almost any other phase of growth.[2]

As the recognition of individual differences developed, so did the teaching methodology for the English classroom. Its development can be traced through three stages:

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[1]Henry C. Meckel, "Research of Teaching Composition and Literature," Handbook of Research on Teaching, A Project of the American Educational Research Association: A Department of the National Education Association. Edited by N. L. Gage (Chicago: Rand-McNally and Company, 1963), p. 968.

[2]Ibid., p. 969.

1. In the first stage, grammar was systematically and formally taught by emphasizing the learning of rules and applications.
2. In the second stage, grammar was devoted primarily to the correction of errors commonly made by children and adults--the functional stage. Unfortunately, repeated studies have failed to show that grammar serves this purpose.
3. Grammar is now finally emerging into a third rather nebulous stage called "instrumental grammar," which is tuaght incidentally to composition, with language elements being identified and named, and principles of construction and usage observed.[1]

As can be seen from the three stages in the development of teaching methodology in the English classroom, one can find teachers who believe in and pattern their teaching methods in each of the stages.

> Crow and Crow do not advocate a return to the old days of formal study and memorization of grammatical rules, but their experiences in teaching (elementary level to college level) cause them to believe that correction of errors in usage is made more meaningful if the pupil understands the reason for his error and the need for improvement.[2]

As a result of their study, Crow and Crow felt that some formalized study of grammar seems to be a necessary part of teaching in languages. However, how much and just what

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[1]Willard F. Tidyman and Marguerite Butterfield, Teaching the Language Arts (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1951), pp. 24-25.

[2]Lester D. Crow and Alice Crow, Educational Psychology (New York: American Book Company, 1948), pp. 424-25.

needs to be included in the study needs further research.

In 1957 Robert C. Pooley polled twenty leaders in the public school English instruction in different parts of the United States--teachers and supervisors--to determine prevailing attitudes of teachers concerning instruction in grammar. The following view of grammar represented the opinion of a majority of teachers at the time of the survey.

> Grammar is the means to improved speech and writing. Because it explains usage, grammar must be learned to support usage instruction. Grammar skills are best gained by learning the parts of speech, the elements of the sentence, and the kinds of sentences. These skills are usually all taught before the end of the ninth year. Drill and practice from textbooks and workbooks establishes grammar, which will then function in composition.[1]

Dora V. Smith carried the use of drill as found in some schools in the United States to a more deplorable state. She observed:

> The opinion is held in certain small towns and also in larger ones by some teachers and by many powerful administrators that the lower the mentality of the pupils and the less opportunity they have to hear good English outside of school, the more English they need. Such programs automatically shut off their opportunity for <u>hearing</u> good English in school and for <u>practicing</u> the use of good English themselves.[2]

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[1]Meckel, <u>op. cit.</u>, p. 974.

[2]Dora V. Smith, <u>Evaluating Instruction in Secondary School English</u>, A Report of a Division of the New York Regents Inquiry into the Character and Cost of Public Education in New York State, English Monograph No. 11 (Chicago: National Council of Teachers of English, 1941), p. 112.

The lower the mentality of the student the less able he is to generalize. There is no amount of drill, Smith felt, which will help the slow learner in transferring the knowledge obtained from an intensive study of grammar to writing and speaking. What the slow learner must have is adequate oral or written practice in composition in order to learn how to express himself satisfactorily in his social and business contacts, whereas the time spent on workbook or blackboard drill usually results in wasted time.[1]

III. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EXTENT OF DRILL AND COMPETENCE IN COMPOSITION

Meckel, who investigated much research in the area of the relationship between drill and composition, classified the studies related to the teaching of composition through the use of grammar into seven categories:

1. Those in which the emphasis is on the transfer value of knowledge of definitions of grammatical terms and the ability to parse.
2. Those aimed at determining the transfer value of diagramming.
3. Those attempting to ascertain the value of grammatical knowledge for skill in punctuation.
4. Those designed to identify critical items of usage and the so-called "functional" principles of grammar associated with them.

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[1] Ibid.

5. Those primarily concerned with the determination of phrases of sentence structure in which pupils most need instruction.
6. Those attempting to appraise the efficiency of methods of instruction which emphasize the relation of grammatical structure to the adequate expression of ideas; and
7. Those which emphasize that practice in writing is superior to all else.[1]

If one gives these seven categories careful scrutiny, he will notice that they correspond very closely to the three stages of teaching methodology in the English classroom previously mentioned in this chapter. He will also note that of these seven categories, all have drill or practice involved somewhere in their structure. The first six, however, are based upon the idea that if the student knows the fundamental rules and concepts of grammar he will be able to write the language with accuracy and clarity, and the seventh contains no formal grammar instruction but assumes incidental learning will occur.

Briggs, however, was interested in challenging the claims of the traditionalists that grammar had a value as a mental discipline. To do this, he set up two comparison classes of seventh grade pupils at Columbia University's Horace Mann School. When the project was finished, he compared his test results with pupils in five Illinois schools.

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[1]Meckel, op. cit., p. 974.

> Briggs' tests were designed to measure a fairly high degree of grammatical knowledge: ability to explain syntax and the use of words and groups of words in sentences, application of grammatical definitions, ability to parse, and ability to recognize types of sentences. Among Briggs' conclusions were these: (1) Despite the general interest of the children in classroom work, they learned just enough grammar to be a disappointment and source of vexation to teachers in high school. (2) Whatever be the truth about the amount of transfer, it is a question whether, under the ordinary conditions elementary school children can learn enough of formal grammar to justify the study.[1]

While studies and opinion tend to disregard the teaching of grammar as a waste of time, there are areas in which formal teaching must occur. Harry A. Greene felt that one of the most plausible claims for teaching grammar is that it enables the students to attain a better understanding of sentences. He stated: "But there is no evidence which shows that systematic instruction in recognition of grammatical elements or of complete subject-predicate results in sentence mastery."[2]

Regardless of the individual teacher's exact philosophy, his major objective in teaching English is to help the student become successful in the oral and written communication in society. But just what is "success?"

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[1] Ibid., pp. 975-76.

[2] J. Conrad Seegers, "Grammar and Usage--Some Current Thoughts," School Review, LVIII (November, 1950), 471.

The bright student may not reach success until he can think straight and draw conclusions and express them with clarity. However, the slower student may reach success if he can think fairly straight and express himself with enough clarity to get by in the world. All students will never achieve the same amount of learning, but the teacher should motivate each student to accomplish as much as he is capable. And the best way to find out what the student can accomplish and the areas of need is through examination of the written work turned in to the teacher and through listening to his oral presentations.[1]

> The necessity of a program of corrective work adjusted to the individual needs is recognized by many authorities. Next in importance to generating a desire to speak correctly is recognizing the fact that errors are, for the most part, individual. Growth is achieved by means of a motivated attack by the individual child upon the errors which he himself makes. The remedial work which follows revelations of language weakness must be largely, if not exclusively, individual.[2]

As children progress through the normal classroom oral units which involve normal conversation, storytelling, and reports, the teacher has an opportunity to accomplish something in helping him eliminate errors by suggesting the proper forms to be used. When the child hesitates and

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[1] Ibid., pp. 975-76.

[2] J. N. Hook, The Teaching of High School English (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1959), p. 239.

searches for the correct form to use in his presentation, the teacher can supply it at the time, or if the teacher wishes, she may make the correction at the end of the presentation. Tidyman emphasized that the child with a difficulty frequently needs instruction as well as practice. The practice exercises used to correct faulty comprehension of usage principles involve a choice of construction where the student chooses the correct form, proofreading prepared material, writing from dictation, and original writing.[1] Florence Bowles suggested some activities that seem particularly interesting to help the student surplant errors with the correct forms. They are:

1. having the students act out the roles found in comic strips that employ grammatical mistakes to get laughs;
2. having the students listen to records, radio, and television programs and record the grammatical errors;
3. having the students write a playlet demonstrating the effect on the grammar conscious ear of incorrect grammatical forms; and
4. having the student keep a record of his errors in red ink and then recording the correct form in black after he has successfully corrected himself.[2]

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[1]Tidyman, op. cit., p. 337.

[2]Florence Chisholm Bowles, "Helping Students Learn Better English Usage," School Review, LX (November, 1952), 489.

Perhaps the most thorough study in this area of drill was done by Stewart in 1941. Stewart's study was an advance over previous studies in design: It involved approximately 1000 pupils in twenty-two randomly selected schools who had not received previous study in diagramming. Comparisons were made between groups taught by the same teacher. The control and experimental classes were chosen on a random basis, and the experimental period lasted eight weeks. The data collected was treated by analysis of covariance. Stewart's purpose was to determine the effectiveness of sentence diagramming as a method of teaching usage, capitalization, punctuation, grammatical information, and sentence structure. The experimental classes were taught methods which largely utilized diagramming; control classes were taught the same language skills, but by writing original sentences and rewriting poor sentences. Results were measured by use of the Iowa Every-Pupil Test in English Correctness (1939 and 1940 editions); a test utilizing items selected from forms of the Iowa Grammar Information Test; a special diagramming test; and a test of skill in sentence construction which required the student to combine short sentences into long sentences. The results led Stewart to conclude that diagramming drill had no superiority in

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[1]Meckel, op. cit., p. 976.

instructional value over direct use of composition exercises.

Another study instituted to investigate the correlation between grammar and the ability to construct and recognize good sentences was conducted by Asker in 1923. For this study he used the grades of 295 freshmen at the University of Washington. Askers reported the following correlation coefficients: between grammatical knowledge and ability to judge correctness of sentence, .23; between grammatical knowledge and grades in freshman composition, .37; and between freshman composition and grades in all subjects, .63.[1]

While there appears to be little correlation between grammar and the ability to write acceptable sentences, it is still necessary to convey one's thoughts and ideas in an acceptable manner according to the society in which one lives and that society in which he must participate.

In an investigation to find ways of improving language usage, Symonds studied six methods. These are:

1. Oral drill with written drill sheets on correct forms;
2. Oral drill with written drill sheets in which correct and incorrect forms were printed side by side;

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[1] Ibid.

3. Study of definitions, rules, and principles of grammar;
4. Grammar analysis in which pupils were given instruction in determining parts of speech and usage in the sentence;
5. Practice in choosing the correct usage to fill a blank;
6. A method that incorporated all the previous procedures.[1]

From her investigations, Symonds found the following indications:

1. That use of a combination of methods was most effective.
2. That practice in correct and incorrect forms was next in effectiveness.
3. That practice in choosing correct form was effective.
4. Students receiving grammatical instruction made gains but only about half the gain that was made after receiving necessary instruction with correct and incorrect forms.
5. That drill on correct forms was least effective, and when prolonged it appeared to have negative results.
6. Brighter pupils appeared to profit most from grammatical approaches.[2]

There may be in the new methodology no magic which eliminates the need for drill; but practice alone may fail to assure competency. It is generally agreed by the researchers cited above that to make practice effective it should be purposeful to the learner, related to every-

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[1] Ibid., pp. 978-9.

[2] Ibid.

day use and form, and should follow clear ideas of correct form.

The cycle of learning experience in developing a single skill includes: (1) discovery of need, (2) use in context, (3) recognition of the correct form, and (4) practice.[1] It is between practice and use in context that the trouble begins. The teacher hopes that there will be a transfer from the drill to its actual application. Glenn Blair stated: "Anything which can be learned can be transferred including such things as attitudes, a feeling of self-confidence, sets, skills, facts, and other items that make up school work."[2] Regardless of the theories proposed as to develop this transfer of knowledge, many teachers of composition believe that the development of writing skills is more closely related to the amount of practice that the pupils have in actual writing. Because of a renewed interest in teaching English, the questioning of old beliefs is on the rise, particularly the over-emphasis of grammar.

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[1]Tidyman, op. cit., p. 299.

[2]Glenn Myers Blair, R. Stewart Jones, and Roy H. Simpson, Educational Psychology (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1962), p. 302.

IV. STUDIES OF TRANSFER BETWEEN GRAMMAR AND COMPOSITION

There are few good studies which try to reveal the amount of transfer between the study of grammar and ability to write good sentences and paragraphs. Those that attempt to answer this problem, however, find themselves involved in subjective analysis of test results which lowers their validity.

Meckel cited several studies comparing grammar drill with actual writing in quantity to discover which has the most impact upon developing writing skills. Three of these studies were: Looke and Wykoff (1948); Dressel, Schmid, and Kincaid (1952); and Maize (1954).

1. Looke and Wykoff increased the number of themes required in two small experimental freshman classes from sixteen to thirty-two a semester. They concluded that the added practice in writing reduced failures 66 per cent and produced a 60 per cent improvement in grades.
2. Dressel, Schmid, and Kincaid asked 2,400 freshmen how much writing they did in all courses during an academic year and compared the improvement of students doing the most writing with that of students doing the least. They concluded that more practice in writing will not improve composition skills, unless attention is given to the quality of writing.
3. Maize, using two groups of randomly selected remedial students, compared a control class which followed a workbook drill on grammar, punctuation, and spelling and wrote fourteen weekly themes corrected by the instructor,

> with an experimental group which wrote forty themes. The instructor did not read or correct any of the writing of the experimental group outside regular class hours; instead the instructor and students analyzed and commented on the themes in the writing laboratory. The experimental group showed greater improvements in all scores on the Rinsland-Beck Natural Test of English Usage except vocabulary.[1]

During the past years grammar had been taught with the hope that it would carry over to developing writing skills. However, since the 1930's, studies were developed which tend to refute this belief. While grammatical drill succeeded in removing such unsatisfactory speech patterns as "ain't," and "John, he went," etc., to allow the individual to converse in society, it did not prove to help him express himself in writing. It appears that the only solution to improving writing skills, is to practice writing under close supervision. Following this idea, the latest trend in teaching English stresses writing and oral work as a means of social interaction and reduces the time spent on formal grammar and usage drills.

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[1]Meckel, op. cit., pp. 982-83.

CHAPTER III

PROCEDURES

This study was conducted at the Albert W. Merrill Junior High School, Des Moines Independent Community School District, Des Moines, Iowa, and involved two intact classes of thirty-four advanced track seventh grade students each. These classes had been previously scheduled by the administration on a random basis. Both classes were taught by the writer.

The first step in organizing the project was to establish comparability between the two groups involved in the study. The only criterion used to determine the beginning comparability of the two groups was a comparison of the mean intelligence scores of each group. The average intelligence scores of the two groups differed by only 2.2 points. Using this result, it was assumed that the two groups were similar at the beginning of the experimental project.

After a comparability between the two groups had been established, it was necessary to determine the proficiency of the students in the areas of grammar, usage, and written expression. The student proficiency was determined by administering a pretest (See Appendix B, p. 69), which included grammatical and usage errors and by having each

student write a theme. After the grammar and usage pretest had been completed, a tally of errors was recorded for each student. These results were then set aside until they could be compared with a post-test administered at the end of the project. The themes were checked and each area of consideration was given a score ranging from one to five, with the score of one representing the lowest value. The guidelines used for scoring this and all themes written during the project came from an adaptation of a revised Diedrick Scale (See Appendix A, p. 68) studied at a National Defense Education Act Institute in English, Wichita, Kansas.

To decide which of the two groups would be the control group and which would be the experimental group, two slips of paper, one bearing the number one and one bearing the number two, were placed in a box. The first slip drawn from the box would be the control group. This position fell to Group 1, the morning class.

During the length of the project period, each group received its own unique treatment of the subject material. The control group adhered to a formal grammar-usage program, interspersed with composition. A unit of study such as subject-verb agreement was introduced to the group. After the formal presentation and discussion, the students would complete the exercises in the textbook. If more practice was

deemed necessary, additional supplementary materials were used. After this portion of the work was presented, each student would write a theme, putting into practice his new skills. This same procedure was used whether the skill being introduced pertained to grammar, usage, or composition skills.

The method of instruction for the experimental group was based on the needs of the individual as derived from the results of the student's performance in a particular writing exercise. After the experimental group had completed the first theme, each paper was checked for grammar, usage, and theme structure. Errors which occurred more than once were noted at the end of the student theme and were correlated to corrective exercises in the textbook. When the theme was returned, the student completed the corrective exercises, which also included spelling errors. If the student felt that he needed individual explanation of his deficiencies, oral counseling was readily available. In remedial exercises of this nature, one student might understand the use of "sit" and "set" but have trouble with "lie" and "lay." In individual drill it was not necessary that this student spend his time on the areas which he understood, but it allowed him to strengthen his weaknesses.

These procedures were continued until each group had completed the series of skill building exercises in grammar,

usage, and composition. At the end of the project a post-test in grammar and usage was administered and then compared to the pretest. In addition the first and last theme became the base for determining improvement in composition. The results of the project are expressed as the mean for each variable studied, within and between groups.[1]

[1]The group mean for each variable studied was computed with the cooperation of Mr. VanDorn of the Drake University Computer Center, Drake University, Des Moines, Iowa.

CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION OF DATA

The data collected during the period of the field study consists of two major divisions: (1) the grammar and usage pretest and post-test, and (2) two themes, one written at the beginning of the study and one written at the conclusion, involving composition skills, grammar skills, and usage skills. The results from each of the tests and themes are depicted through the use of the tabled data.

In the first set of tables, the grammar and usage pretest and post-test, the basis for reporting the results is the group mean error for each measured variable. The findings in the second set of tables, the two themes, come from a one to five base scale with a group mean of one representing the lowest possible value and a group score of five indicating the highest possible score. The findings are reported as a mean score for each variable.

I. PRESENTATION OF GRAMMAR AND USAGE PRETEST AND POST-TEST DATA

In Table I, page 42, the mean errors of the control group and the experimental group follow the same general pattern, with the significant differences occurring in the proficiency of spelling, in the use of apostrophes, in the

use of the correct adjective-adverb form, in adequate sentence structure, in complete subject-verb agreement, and in the satisfactory use of quotation marks. While scores differed significantly in six areas of knowledge, they were the same in capitalization and in recognition and formation of possessives. The control group and the experimental groups differed by .3 of a mean error or less in the remainder of the variables.

TABLE I

MEAN NUMBER OF ERRORS OF CONTROL GROUP AND EXPERIMENTAL GROUP ON THE GRAMMAR AND USAGE PRETEST

Variable measured	Control Group	Experimental Group
Spelling	3.8	4.6
Capitalization	1.2	1.2
Commas	3.4	3.2
Quotation marks	2.1	1.7
Apostrophes	3.2	2.3
Pronouns	3.7	4.0
Verb form and tense	1.5	1.6
Subject-verb agreement	5.8	5.5
Possessives	1.7	1.2
Adjective-adverb form	3.3	3.3
Sentence structure	1.4	3.2
Homonyms	2.6	3.2
Double negatives	3.6	3.3
Prepositional choice	3.9	4.2
Word choice	2.8	3.1

A comparison of the mean number of errors between the control group's grammar and usage pretest and post-test (Table II) shows greater difference in the pretest scores than in the post-test scores. The only variables which show a mean difference of .3 errors or less are spelling, capitalization, use of commas, recognition and use of homonyms, and making the correct prepositional choice. The variable which shows the most striking extreme is that which involves a knowledge of subject-verb agreement.

TABLE II

MEAN NUMBER OF ERRORS ON THE CONTROL GROUP GRAMMAR AND USAGE PRETEST AND POST-TEST

Variable Measured	Pretest	Post-test
Spelling	3.8	3.7
Capitalization	1.2	1.1
Commas	3.4	3.4
Quotation marks	2.1	1.0
Apostrophes	3.2	2.3
Pronouns	3.7	2.9
Verb form and tense	1.5	1.0
Subject-verb agreement	5.8	2.6
Possessives	3.7	2.9
Adjective-adverb form	3.3	2.5
Sentence structure	1.4	2.0
Homonyms	2.6	2.4
Double negatives	3.6	2.9
Prepositional choice	3.9	3.6
Word choice	2.8	1.6

In Table III the mean scores on the experimental group's grammar and usage pretest and post-test, while showing a definite erratic pattern, do not differ as greatly as those found in Table II. While Table II has five variables which have a mean difference of .3 or less, Table III indicates seven: spelling, capitalization, quotation marks, verb form and tense, recognition of possessives, use of homonyms, and use of double negatives. Again the greatest difference occurred in the subject-verb agreement variable.

TABLE III

MEAN NUMBER OF ERRORS ON THE EXPERIMENTAL GROUP GRAMMAR AND USAGE PRETEST AND POST-TEST

Variable Measured	Pretest	Post-test
Spelling	4.6	4.6
Capitalization	1.2	1.4
Commas	3.2	4.0
Quotation marks	1.7	1.8
Apostrophes	2.3	3.5
Pronouns	4.0	3.1
Verb form and tense	1.6	1.6
Subject-verb agreement	5.5	3.2
Possessives	1.2	1.1
Adjective-adverb form	3.3	2.7
Sentence structure	3.2	4.4
Homonyms	3.2	3.1
Double negatives	4.3	4.1
Prepositional choice	4.2	3.6
Word choice	3.1	1.9

In Table IV, page 45, a comparison of the control group and the experimental group mean errors on the grammar

and usage post-test indicates an obvious lack of extremes in the individual variable scores as compared to the scores found in the previous tables is quite noticeable. Of the variables, possessives and sentence structure seem to lack any positive degree of correlation. The variables which follow the general pattern of .3 error difference are: capitalization, quotation marks, pronoun usage, subject-verb agreement, correct prepositional choice, and correct word choice. The remainder of the variables do not contain differences of any great extremes.

TABLE IV

MEAN NUMBER OF ERRORS OF THE CONTROL GROUP AND THE EXPERIMENTAL GROUP GRAMMAR AND USAGE POST-TEST

Variable Measured	Control Group	Experimental Group
Spelling	3.7	4.6
Capitalization	1.1	1.4
Commas	3.4	4.0
Quotation marks	1.6	1.8
Apostrophes	2.3	3.5
Pronouns	2.9	3.1
Verb form and tense	1.0	1.6
Subject-verb agreement	2.6	3.2
Possessives	3.9	1.1
Adjective-adverb form	2.5	2.7
Sentence structure	2.0	4.4
Homonyms	2.4	3.1
Double negatives	2.9	4.1
Prepositional choice	3.6	3.6
Word choice	1.6	1.9

II. PRESENTATION OF DATA OBTAINED FROM GRADED THEMES

Tables V through VII compare the control group with the experimental group in the initial theme written by both groups. The major point of interest in Table V is found in the last five variables. The control group shows an even pattern of performance in these variables, while the experimental group shows the same even pattern in just the last three. In contrast, both groups, while their scores parallel each other, are quite erratic in the first three variables.

TABLE V

COMPARISON OF BEGINNING COMPOSITION SKILLS BETWEEN CONTROL GROUP AND EXPERIMENTAL GROUP ON THEME 1*

Variable Measured	Control Group	Experimental Group
Introduction	3.2	3.6
Conclusion	2.5	2.6
Unity	3.1	3.3
Completeness	3.0	2.6
Coherence	3.1	3.1
Originality	3.3	3.3
Paragraph development	3.5	3.4

*Theme scores are based on a five-point scale with 5.0 representing the highest value.

The proficiency of the control group and the experimental group in grammatical skills as demonstrated in Theme one shows a marked difference in the areas of redundancy and sentence structure (See Table VI). However, according to the results of Theme 1, both groups rated high in controlling the fault of omitting necessary words.

TABLE VI

COMPARISON OF GRAMMAR PROFICIENCY IN THEME WRITING BETWEEN THE PRETEST OF THE CONTROL AND EXPERIMENTAL GROUPS

Variable Measured	Control Group	Experimental Group
Redundancy	3.4	4.6
Inadequate sentence structure	3.6	4.0
Omission of words	4.7	4.7

In Table VII the control group and the experimental group show a remarkably parallel pattern in their practical knowledge of usage in Theme 1. The two areas of greatest divergence are capitalization and the correct adjective-adverb form.

During the field study period the control group indicated an observable increase in scores on grammar, usage and composition skills as shown in their written themes.

TABLE VII

COMPARISON OF USAGE PROFICIENCY IN WRITTEN THEMES AS SHOWN IN THE PRETESTS OF THE CONTROL AND EXPERIMENTAL GROUPS

Variable Measured	Control Group	Experimental Group
Spelling	4.2	4.0
Capitalization	4.1	4.7
Punctuation	3.1	3.1
Pronouns and antecedents	4.5	4.7
Prepositional choice	4.8	4.8
Verb form and tense	4.7	4.7
Subject-verb agreement	4.7	4.7
Possessives	4.8	4.8
Adjective-adverb form	4.6	4.9

The composition skills of the control goup show marked improvement in the development of a concluding statement, control of unity within a topic, completeness of ideas, and use of an appropriate form of paragraph development (See Table VIII, p. 49). Table IX, page 49, shows a definite improvement in the ability to eliminate redundant phrases from written materials and in the proficiency of developing adequate sentence structures. Table X, page 50, while showing a general trend of improvement in the usage skills, does not show the wide margin of improvement found in certain variables of Tables VIII and IX. The greatest gains in usage are found in the areas of the mechanical skills: spelling, capitalization, punctuation, with the

non-mechanical skill of pronoun usage showing the most improvement in that area.

TABLE VIII

COMPARISON OF CONTROL GROUP'S IMPROVEMENT IN COMPOSITION SKILLS THROUGH THEME WRITING

Variable Measured	Theme 1	Theme 10
Introduction	3.2	3.3
Conclusion	2.5	3.5
Unity	3.1	3.5
Completeness	3.0	3.4
Coherence	3.1	3.2
Originality	3.2	3.5
Paragraph development	3.5	3.9

TABLE IX

COMPARISON OF CONTROL GROUP'S IMPROVEMENT IN GRAMMAR SKILLS THROUGH THEME WRITING

Variable Measured	Theme 1	Theme 10
Redundancy	3.4	4.2
Inadequate sentence structure	3.6	4.4
Omission of words	4.7	4.8

Of the three skills--composition, grammar, and usage--the control group improved the most in grammar.

TABLE X

COMPARISON OF CONTROL GROUP'S IMPROVEMENT IN USAGE SKILLS THROUGH THEME WRITING

Variable Measured	Theme 1	Theme 10
Spelling	4.2	4.6
Capitalization	4.1	4.7
Punctuation	3.1	3.6
Pronouns and antecedents	4.5	4.9
Prepositional choice	4.8	4.9
Verb form and tense	4.7	4.8
Subject-verb agreement	4.7	4.6
Possessives	4.8	4.8
Adjective-adverb form	4.6	4.8

Tables XI through XIII illustrate the results of the experimental group's development in composition, grammar, and usage skills through the medium of theme writing. As with the data from the control group, the experimental group shows the most improvement in composition and grammar skills, with the proficiency growth in usage showing only a slight over-all increase. With the experimental group the greatest increase appears in the general composition skills. The experimental group shows measurable progress in all variables of the study. The experimental group failed to show an increase in only two areas--the use of an introductory statement and correct verb form and tense.

TABLE XI

COMPARISON OF EXPERIMENTAL GROUP'S IMPROVEMENT IN COMPOSITION SKILLS THROUGH THEME WRITING

Variable Measured	Theme 1	Theme 10
Introduction	3.6	3.4
Conclusion	2.6	3.1
Unity	3.3	3.7
Completeness	2.6	3.3
Coherence	3.1	3.5
Originality	3.2	3.4
Paragraph development	3.4	3.7

From a study of Tables XI through XIII, it is apparent that the experimental group obtained its greatest increase from the individualized method in the area of the composition skills, with the grammar and usage areas showing only a slight improvement.

TABLE XII

COMPARISON OF EXPERIMENTAL GROUP'S IMPROVEMENT IN GRAMMAR SKILLS THROUGH THEME WRITING

Variable Measured	Theme 1	Theme 10
Redundancy	4.6	4.7
Inadequate sentence structure	4.0	4.3
Omission of words	4.7	4.7

TABLE XIII

COMPARISON OF EXPERIMENTAL GROUP'S IMPROVEMENT IN USAGE SKILLS THROUGH THEME WRITING

Variable Measured	Theme 1	Theme 10
Spelling	4.0	4.6
Capitalization	4.7	4.9
Punctuation	3.1	3.7
Pronouns and antecedents	4.7	4.9
Prepositional choice	4.8	4.8
Verb form and tense	4.7	4.5
Subject-verb agreement	4.7	4.8
Possessives	4.8	4.8
Adjective-adverb form	4.9	4.9

The results of the final theme, Tables XIV through XVI, depict a striking similarity between the scores of the control group and the experimental group. Table XIV shows how the control group, taught by the formal presentation method, exhibits fewer extremes in scores than the experimental group, which was taught on the individualized basis.

In grammatical development, Table XV, the greatest discrepancy between the two groups was in the ability to eliminate redundant phrases from their writing. In this area of scoring, the control group scored much lower than the experimental group.

Table XVI illustrates an exceptionally parallel development in usage with the post-test results of the

experimental group falling below the control group in making correct prepositional choices and recognizing errors of verb form and tense.

TABLE XIV

COMPARISON OF COMPOSITION SKILLS IN WRITTEN THEMES AS SHOWN IN THE POST-TESTS OF THE CONTROL AND THE EXPERIMENTAL GROUPS

Variable Measured	Control Group	Experimental Group
Introduction	3.3	3.4
Conclusion	3.5	3.1
Unity	3.5	3.7
Completeness	3.4	3.3
Coherence	3.2	3.5
Originality	3.5	3.4
Paragraph development	3.9	3.7

TABLE XV

COMPARISON OF GRAMMAR SKILLS IN WRITTEN THEMES AS SHOWN IN THE POST-TEST OF THE CONTROL AND THE EXPERIMENTAL GROUPS

Variable Measured	Control Group	Experimental Group
Redundancy	4.2	4.7
Inadequate sentence structure	4.4	4.3
Omission of words	4.8	4.7

TABLE XVI

COMPARISON OF USAGE SKILLS IN WRITTEN THEMES AS SHOWN IN THE POST-TESTS OF THE CONTROL AND THE EXPERIMENTAL GROUPS

Variable Measured	Control Group	Experimental Group
Spelling	4.6	4.6
Capitalization	4.7	4.9
Punctuation	3.6	3.7
Pronouns and antecedents	4.9	4.9
Prepositional choice	4.9	4.8
Verb form and tense	4.8	4.5
Subject-verb agreement	4.6	4.8
Possessives	4.8	4.8
Adjective-adverb form	4.8	4.9

The data for this study were obtained from a study made at the Albert W. Merrill Junior High School, Des Moines, Iowa. The purpose of the study was to determine whether or not seventh grade advanced students would develop in composition skills as rapidly under an individual teaching approach as under a formal group teaching method.

III. CONCLUSIONS OF DATA

In this study the control group and the experimental group, according to a study of pretest results on the grammar and usage tests, indicated a close similarity in proficiency in these areas of study. On the grammar and usage pretest the control group's average mean error was 2.93, and the

average mean error of the experimental group was 3.04. The only area which presented a noticeable discrepancy in this pattern was in the area of sentence structure where the difference between the two groups was 1.8. As a result of the grammar and usage pretest, the two groups can be considered comparable in initial ability in this area of skills.

A comparison of the grammar and usage pretest and post-tests of both the control group and the experimental groups showed that the control group consistently scored fewer errors in the post-test than did the experimental group. On the post-test the control group scored an average mean error of 2.4 and the experimental group, 2.9. The control group had only one variable that contained more errors in the post-test than in the pretest while the experimental group fell behind in five areas of grammar and usage. From this comparison, the use of a more formalized procedure with prescribed drill in the teaching of grammar and usage appeared more productive to the students than individualized instruction with remedial drill.

The observation cited in Paragraph 2 gained accreditation after a study of Table IV. With the recognition and punctuation of possessives and knowledge of correct prepositional choice, the experimental group scored more errors in all areas of study than did the members of the control group. According to the finding of this study, a

formal method of presenting grammar and usage materials held a slight advantage, 2.5 average mean error, over the methodology that stressed individualized instruction, 2.94 average mean errors, again indicating a preference for formal teaching.

From the initiation of the project to its close, both group improved but only slightly in grammar and usage skills. The control group made .43 average errors less at the end of the project, whereas the experimental group improved by only .1. Although improvement is slight with both groups, the results in this instance tend to favor the use of the formal approach with prescribed drill in the teaching of grammar and usage.

In general composition skills the experimental group held a slight edge of .03 grade value over the control group at the beginning of the project. During the study each group improved substantially with the control group showing the most even development in all areas of composition skills. The experimental group tended to be a little more erratic in the group scores. In a comparison of post-tests, the results are quite similar, but with the control group showing a very slight edge of .03. As a result of the study of composition skills, it appeared that there was no observable difference in the value of the tested methods when used with advanced students to obtain growth in general

paragraph writing. Both groups did equally well, regardless of the method under which they were taught.

In the pretest of grammatical ability in theme writing the experimental group scored 1.2 points higher on the subtest measuring ability to recognize and eliminate redundancy than the control group. The experimental group also scored .4 points more than the control group in knowledge of sentence structure. However, both groups had the same score on the error of omitting necessary words. During the course of the study, the control group showed the greatest improvement in all areas of grammatical knowledge. The experimental group made only a negligible advancement. When the post-tests of each group were compared, the experimental group ranked higher in the redundancy factor, but fell behind the control group in sentence structure and omission of words. Again, it appeared that the formalized method of presenting the material did not have a marked advantage over the individualized method. At the end of the program the experimental group showed an improvement of only .1 grade point over that of the control group.

In the usage portion of the written materials, the experimental group scored slightly higher on the initial test than did the control group. During the project period both groups showed definite improvement in most areas, particularly in mechanics. Nevertheless, on the post-tests

the two groups scored nearly the same. As a result of the close proximity of the usage scores in theme construction, a judgment as to the better method of teaching is not feasible.

In most of the areas tested, the experimental group method of individualized instruction with remedial drills held a very slight advantage over the control method or formal group instruction with prescribed drills. It is impossible to make a positive judgment on the basis of the results of this study as outside influences are bound to extend themselves into the study. Some of these influences are: (1) the size of the classes--the control group and the experimental group each had thirty-four members, which does not allow enough time for each student to be adequately instructed; otherwise, the rate of improvement might have been greater; (2) the receptiveness of the students to the class situation and subject matter; (3) the regression phenonemon--the students may have done their best on the pretest and could do no better on the post-test; (4) the time of day--the control class met in the morning and the experimental group met in the afternoon; and (5) the instructor may have unwittingly inserted opinions or attitudes detrimental to one or both methods. Since these three skills were open to many influences, the above influences are merely some of the reasons why additional

studies should be made with these variables as the major concern of the researcher.

The seventh grade advanced students with proper guidance can achieve as well through the use of formal presentation and prescribed drills as through individual instruction and remedial drills, or conversely, as well with individualized instruction as with formal presentation of materials.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It was the purpose of this study to determine whether or not written and oral comments coupled with individual discussion and prescribed practice drills are comparable in developing student writing ability at the seventh grade level to written and oral comments coupled with general class discussion and remedial exercises as conducted at the Albert W. Merrill Junior High School, Des Moines Independent Community School District, Des Moines, Iowa.

I. SUMMARY

In preparing this study the writer referred to books, periodicals, and studies pertaining to the effectiveness of both individualized study and group study. A grammar and usage pretest and post-test were administered and the results computed to determine the gain under each teaching methodology. In addition a series of themes were written and analyzed for various composition, grammar, and usage errors, with the first and last theme providing the data for determining which teaching method produced the greater gain. The results of the study were presented in table form.

II. CONCLUSIONS

The writer came to the following conclusions as a result of this study:

1. In teaching grammar and usage to advanced seventh grade students, either method, group or individualized, produces approximately the same result. However, there was a slight overall tendency to favor the formal group study method--the class which met in the morning as compared to the afternoon class.
2. In the teaching of composition skills and practical use of grammar and usage there seems to be little preference for either method. The advanced student seems to be able to handle either method and to assimilate the material presented equally well.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

The writer of this field report felt that the following recommendations needed to be presented for consideration.

1. There is a need for further research into this problem, particularly a procedure involving more than one control class and experimental

class and with a minimum of two teachers involved in the teaching procedures.

2. That the individualized approach to the study of composition, grammar, and usage be continued as it seems to provide the student with a greater amount of freedom to progress as his needs are satisfied.

3. Similar programs should be conducted at other ability levels.

4. It is also recommended that both methods of teaching be kept, but used with caution with the needs of the student kept as the major factor in determining the method used.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Theme Grading Scale

I.	Composition	
	A. Introduction	1 2 3 4 5
	B. Conclusion	1 2 3 4 5
	C. Unity	1 2 3 4 5
	D. Completeness	1 2 3 4 5
	E. Coherence	1 2 3 4 5
	F. Originality	1 2 3 4 5
	G. Paragraph development	1 2 3 4 5
II.	Grammar	
	A. Redundancy, triteness	1 2 3 4 5
	B. Inadequate sentence structure	1 2 3 4 5
	C. Omission of necessary words or phrases	1 2 3 4 5
III.	Usage	1 2 3 4 5

(List individual errors)

Grading values:

5 - Represents work well above average for class.
4 - Work is above average but lacks finishing touch.
3 - Material produced is of the level of the majority of the class. Shows effort but lacks insight.
2 - This material is produced with little effort or care for details.
1 - Generally used to indicate incomplete work or work that shows absolutely little effort according to the student ability.

APPENDIX B

Grammar Pretest and Post-test

Where my Uncle Lester and his family lives, there is hills mountains and vallies on every side. It snows in that part of the United States from October untill April. For miles around, you can't find hardly anybody who don't know how to ski. As soon as boys and girls can walk by their-selves, they get skis. My cousins can ski very good they win prizes every year.

Near my uncles lodge there's two famous inns. Most every guest who stays in either of them places comes from new york pennsylvania or ohio. They get off of the train at the railroad station a half a mile away and are driven to the inns in slieghs. Some of the guests are gracefull skiers, but some don't know nothing about the sport.

Last winter me and my mother visited my uncle for a week, and I try to learn to ski. About ninty times i clumb to the top of the most easiest hill, but every time I grewed scared about halfway down. Snowdrifts was everywheres, and I always managed to in one. I tryed to keep my balance, but it don't do no good. Between you and I, their couldn't be a more awkward skier than me anywheres in the world. The next time I stay to the lodge, it will be alright by me if I don't do nothing but sit by the fire and read.

One day during my recent visit, I stopped by the general store with my little cousin, Eric. kEric is the baby of the family, but he sure can ski much better than me. Other people were at the store that day beside Eric and I. Cousin Linda and one of her friend's had been drying there mittens eating cookys and writing post cards their for a half an hour. Mrs. Simpson, a guest at the biggest of the two inns, come in right after Eric and I. She smiled at us four young people. When she seen Erics ski poles, she looked surprised. Can you ski little boy she asked. Eric didn't answer. He just stands their grining.

"Someone should learn this child some manners," said Mrs. Simpson, and her voice wasnt very pleasant. He should of answered when I spoke to him. She turned to Linda and said "Can he really ski."

Linda nods. Of coarse Eric can ski, she says polite. He couldn't tell you so hisself, being that hes to little to know how to talk yet.